

Horticultural science in the present era of mounting challenges and opportunities: *Italus Hortus* one year on

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Published: 13 May 2021

In 2020, the World has witnessed the outbreak and development of the COVID-19 pandemic that has resulted in dreadful health, social, economic, and political impacts at a global scale. Both modern and traditional agriculture, being strongly dependent on the availability, affordability and accessibility of labour, inputs, supplies and services, were seriously impacted by the severe restrictions imposed by governments on intra-national and cross-border movements of people and goods. This has highlighted new aspects of vulnerability of the agricultural sector posing unprecedented challenges that need to be addressed to ensure food security. Horticultural science has the responsibility to take on the challenge, playing a leading role in setting innovative agricultural cropping systems that are more sustainable and resilient.

In the same harsh year, *Italus Hortus* has made its first steps as an international full open-access journal in horticulture. In 2020, the editorial board managed a total 31 submitted manuscripts and, in the same year, a final decision was reached for 29 of them (for two manuscripts this occurred in 2021). This resulted in a total of 21 published papers (2 Reviews, 13 Original Research Papers, and 6 Brief Research Reports) that were included in the three issues of volume 27 (Figure 1).

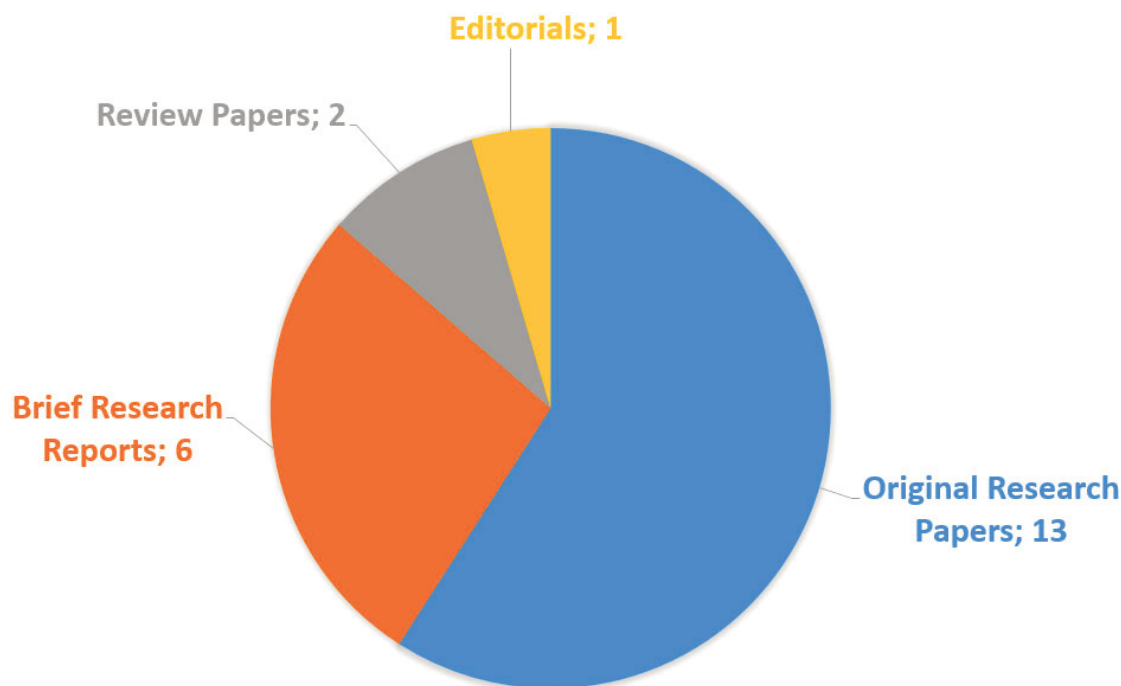


Figure 1. Number of papers published in *Italus Hortus* in 2020 divided by type.

The published papers covered important horticultural topics related to (i) sustainable crop management practices to secure yield stability, nutritional and functional quality of the produce, (ii) the impact of the environment on crop performance, (iii) new technologies for plant breeding and post-harvest management, (iv) plant responses to biotic and abiotic stresses, and (v) the use of biodegradable materials in horticulture. The analysis of the geographical distribution of the corresponding authors (evaluated on the basis of the country where their institution is located) indicates that 71% of the published papers were based in Italy, but a significant contribution was provided also by other countries (Algeria, Chechen republic, Iraq, Poland, and Tunisia) (Figure 2A).

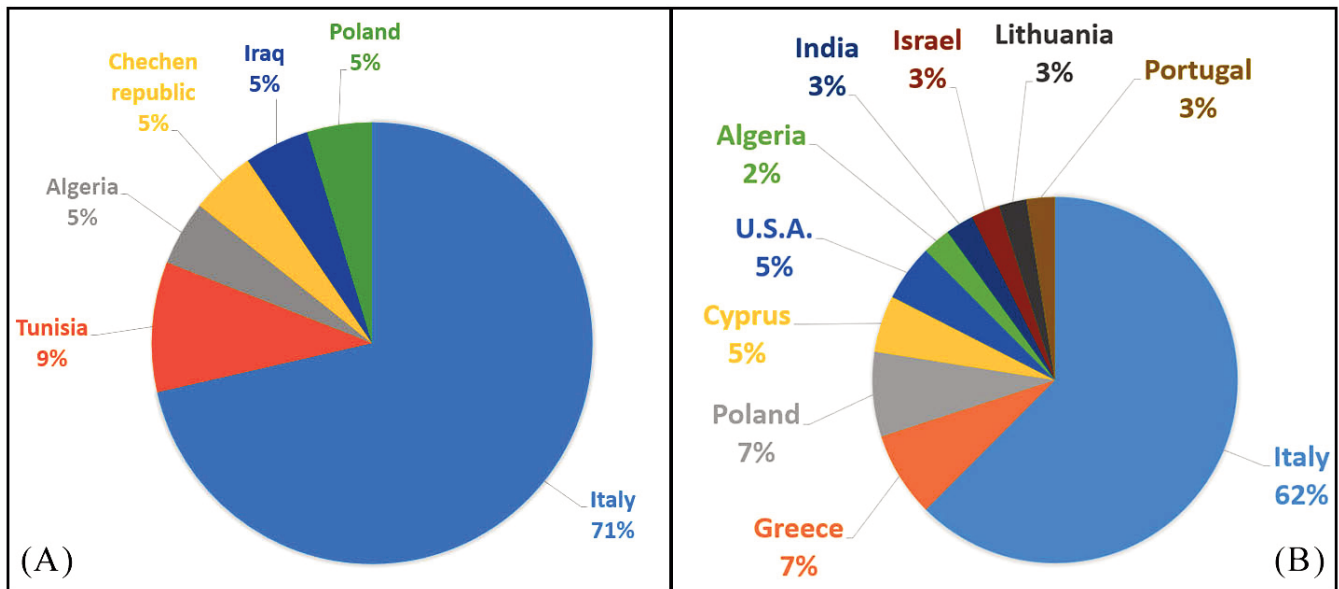
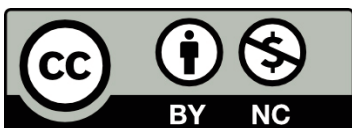


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of (A) the corresponding authors and (B) the reviewers of the papers published by *Italus Hortus* in 2021.

To manage the submitted manuscripts, *Italus Hortus* is now adopting an international reviewing process that, in 2020, has involved a total of 42 scholars and scientists whose institutions are based in ten countries around the globe (Figure 2B). The first decision was provided to authors approximately 30 days after submission.

As Editors of *Italus Hortus*, we are fully committed to participating with the editorial activity of our journal in the international discussion within the realm of horticultural science on how to tackle effectively and promptly the challenging threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and their negative foreseen interactions. We would like to take advantage of this short note to express our sincere gratitude to the members of the editorial board, and the anonymous reviewers for their outstanding contribution to ensure high scientific quality and success to *Italus Hortus* up to now.



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